

# Shadows of Famous "Seeley Dinner"

## Second Matrimonial Wreck of the Bride of Herbert Barnum Seeley Is the Newest of the Long List of Catastrophies Which Have Followed That Notorious Dinner Party



"Little Egypt," Who Came to a Tragic End Like Nearly All the Rest Who Had Anything to Do with the Notorious Seeley Dinner.

THE "Girl in the Pie" dinner and the "Seeley" dinner were the two most notorious dinner-party orgies which the present generation of New Yorkers can recall.

Stanford White, the hero of the "Girl in the Pie" dinner was shot by Harry Thaw, and a long series of misfortunes have followed most of the guests at that famous dinner in the James L. Breese studio.

Even more tragic happenings have pursued almost everybody who was in any way connected with the Seeley dinner. And the last chapter of misfortune apparently has not yet been written.

The bride of Herbert Barnum Seeley, the hero of the notorious banquet sued Seeley for divorce and married Arnold Lawson, son of Thomas W. Lawson, the copper king of Boston. In the Boston courts two divorce suits have been begun, —Arnold Lawson against his wife, the former Mrs. Seeley, and the wife against young Lawson.

The Lawson family are not altogether terrified at the prospect of publicity. And as might be expected in any Lawson proceeding these divorce suits promise a loud, variegated and entertaining scenario of evidence. Eighteen detectives from a detective bureau have been heaping up a bushel-basket with evidence which they are ready to lay before the court.

Young Arnold Lawson and his wife have been prominent in Boston society circles since their marriage in July, 1906. Mrs. Lawson has had more than the usual variety of lively episodes in her life. Since her divorce from the hero of the Seeley dinner and her marriage to young Lawson she has been in the public eye in an unusual way many times.

She established extensive kennels where she personally directed the raising of the finest French bulldogs in the world. At dog shows in this country and Europe her dogs repeatedly swept everything before them, often winning practically all the prizes. She spent a fortune on her dogs and was for many years the greatest of women fanciers. On her trips to add from Europe she engaged a special stateroom for the exclusive occupancy of one of her favorite dogs.

She had a narrow escape from death when the Lawson steam yacht on which she was cruising was wrecked by collision with a fishing schooner. Mrs. Lawson was waist deep in the water and was about to be swept overboard when a fisherman at the risk of his own life drew her to safety.

She suffered the loss of \$10,000 worth of jewelry which was mysteriously stolen from her step-father. The robbery was disclosed as the result of a demand for an accounting of the estate held for Mrs. Lawson, by her step-father.

She was sued by the trustees of her step-father's estate to recover \$25,000 which it was alleged he had advanced her.

The Seeley dinner has left a permanent name in the annals of New York wickedness, perhaps because the city was a smaller place when it was given. It was on December 20, 1894 that this famous Belshazzar's feast occurred.

It was a vaudeville dinner and the most sensational feature was a performance by "Little Egypt," an Oriental dancer. She was lifted up on the table clad in the scantiest of costumes, where she went through her Oriental contortions for the benefit of the guests who had then imbibed unlimited champagne. Her performance was of such a character that it could hardly be described. Captain Chapman, then a prominent police officer, heard what was going on, raided the gay and fashionable banquet, took "Little Egypt" to the police station and ended the festivities.

It is a strange fact that grave misfor-



Mrs. Arnold Lawson and Her Four Children, Arnold, Jr., and Thomas W., the Six-Year-Old Twins, and Daughter Jean and Little Vera.

tune has fallen upon nearly every man who attended that famous Seeley dinner. To-day whenever the name of any person who was present appears in the press, it is nearly always in connection with some unfortunate occurrence.

The dinner was given at Sherry's by Herbert Barnum Seeley for his brother, Clinton Barnum Seeley, who was to be married in a few days. Their father, Nathan Seeley, was an apparently approving guest

at this banquet, which was to be so disastrous in social history. The two young men were grandsons of the great P. T. Barnum, who had bequeathed to them a share in \$3,000,000 acquired by intelligent devotion to the show business.

The guests at the banquet, most of them men of importance in the business and professional world, were exceedingly indignant at Captain Chapman's action in breaking in upon what they called "a private entertainment." They especially resented the critical and even abusive language he used to the women performers at the show. As a result he was tried for exceeding his duties, but exonerated.

"Little Egypt," the dancer who, unclad, save for a few almost superfluous pieces of gauze, danced before the diners the "danse du ventre" or "hootchy kootchy," was perhaps the first person connected with the dinner to suffer its tragic influence. She was found dead in her room under mysterious circumstances. It was clear that she had lain there dead for at least two days. She lay as though the body had been carelessly flung across the bed. Her left hand was tightly clenched. Her mouth, from which blood had poured, was wide open, as though she had died screaming for help. On her throat were livid marks like the imprint of murderers' fingers. No one was able to tell who or what had caused her death.

A strange romance in "Little Egypt's" life was revealed at the time of her death.

Some years before she had danced at a dinner of undergraduates at Harvard. Frederick Hamlin, a young man of wealthy and socially prominent family, was present. He fell in love with her, and the woman, it is said, fell genuinely in love with him. They were married and he took her to the home of his father, a rich New York banker. The father immediately repudiated his daughter-in-law.

The bride resumed the checkered life of a dancer at men's entertainments in New York. Her husband visited her occasionally, but they gradually drifted apart. A few weeks before she was found dead he had told her that he wished to obtain a divorce in order to marry the daughter of a clergyman, a girl acceptable to his family.

"If his father hadn't known of the Seeley dinner," "Little Egypt" said, before her death, "he would have stood for the rest of me. But not for that."

At North Beach, Long Island, a woman was found apparently dying. She had been shot by a mysterious assassin. She refused to tell his name, and as soon as she was able to move disappeared from view. The woman gave her name as Lottie Mortimer. The name was that of one of the performers at the Seeley dinner, and she was thought to be the same.

Herbert Barnum Seeley, the giver of the dinner, suffered many misfortunes and became a ruined man. When his beautiful wife divorced him it was believed to be partly due to the discovery that he had planned this remarkable feast. Little by little he dissipated his share of the \$3,000,000 which had been left by his grandfather. At last he was arrested for maintaining what was alleged to be an improper resort. It was a skating rink on Fourteenth street. Seeley was forced to close the place.

After that he became a bankrupt, his investments in questionable resorts not having proved profitable. Creditors pursued him day and night. The glided youth of the Seeley dinner days avoided him. He became financially and socially an outcast.

Archibald Paul Mitchell, brother-in-law of Seeley, and one of the gay guests at the banquet, came to a tragic end. Mitchell, who was a Wall Street broker, was found dead in bed on New Year's day some years

ago. He lay fully dressed upon the bed and four flowing gas jets told the story of his death. A tube reaching from the nearest one had fallen from his hand and lay upon the floor close beside the bed.

On New Year's Eve, it is said, his wife had reproached him for losing money on the "Street," and also for his fondness for the gay night life of New York. Then she had gone to call on her friend, Miss Dorothy Russell, daughter of Lillian Russell, to pour the story of her sorrows into her friend's sympathetic ears. When she returned the odor of escaping gas led her to her husband's room.

Mrs. Wilson Marshall, the favorite granddaughter of P. T. Barnum, died soon after the dinner. She had made a will leaving all her share of her grandfather's millions to her husband, ignoring her infant daughter. The strange will was broken after a long and bitter fight that ruptured the once pleasant relations between the descendants of the old showman.

Another divorce that followed the Seeley dinner was that of Charles Tobias, also one of the guests.

At the time of the dinner Mrs. Tobias was a bride of only eight months and one of the loveliest young women in New York society. Discussions and dissensions followed the dinner. The young husband and wife drifted apart and a divorce followed which their friends said was due to the ill-fated dinner.

Alfred Marshall, another guest at the dinner, died suddenly and rather mysteriously a few years after the fatal banquet. He was a noted yachtman and also a descendant of the famous showman.

A curious piece of ill-fortune overtook Horatio Harper, familiarly known as "Horry," of the well-known publishing house of Harper. Mr. Harper was, the records prove, the most belligerent of the guests at the dinner. When Captain Chapman rushed among them and demanded a cessation of the shocking festivities, he



"Little Egypt" Danced All Over the Table for the Amusement of the Champagne-Soaked Guests and Then Stepped Down on the Banquet Hall Floor and Danced with Some of the Revellers. By That Time the Thin Veil of Gauze Which Hung from Her Shoulders Had Pretty Well Disappeared and Had Been Torn Into Souvenirs for the Diners.

he was a sophomore at Harvard. One Saturday evening while attending a performance of "The Man in the Moon" company his attention was attracted by a very pretty chorus girl, upon whom he smiled.

The chorus girl's name was Marjorie Lee. Soon it was announced that they were to be married. Mr. Lawson protested that he had never really met the girl. His father then declared that some wicked persons had made use of the young chorus girl in a conspiracy to extort money from the boy's father. The girl was apparently innocent.

Concerning this remarkable affair Mr. Lawson gave out a statement which read in part as follows:

"Last November I was hurriedly called upon and informed that certain parties had entered into a conspiracy for tricking my son, a young student at college, into a secret marriage with a young actress.

"I was informed that they had drugged my son and that at that time he was in their control at a certain Boston hotel, and that if something were not done within an hour the marriage would take place. But it could be prevented by the payment on my part of \$15,000.

"While the story—particularly to me or anyone who knew my son—was absurd and the purpose transparent, the fact that the time selected, Saturday night, when my son had probably gone upon a two days' shooting excursion where I could not reach him for twenty-four hours, made it plausible. While I pretended to be willing to settle with the blackmailers and sent for their terms of payment and the details of whatever arrangement they proposed, I immediately laid the matter before our police authorities, and inside of thirty minutes Inspectors Howard and Collins informed me by telephone that they had the interested parties under their control at the hotel which had been named.

"By this time I found my son was still at my house in Winchester, and in a short time he was with me at my office, prepared to show the falsity and ridiculousness of the statements that had been made. The result of the inspectors' work was to disavow on the part of everyone any wrong intention.

"I believed then and have since that I should have followed the matter at that time and brought criminal action against everyone concerned, but after consultation with the inspectors I permitted the parties to leave the city without prosecution, and I certainly never expected to hear any more of it. But when one of the parties interested arrived in New York the following week he told the story, which was afterward printed, to the effect that I had compelled my son to break off the engagement.

"This aroused the cupidity of certain parties, and I was given to understand that unless I paid blackmail my family and I would be annoyed and harassed by the sensational publication of the stories."

Then, according to Mr. Lawson, his son was sued for \$20,000 for breach of promise. The financier was preparing to fight the matter when he received a note from Miss Lee, saying she was very distressed at what had happened and wished to be allowed to drop the proceedings.



Arnold Lawson with His Four Winning Bulldogs at the Newport Dog Show.

argued long and fiercely, treating the police officer with considerable contempt. "You've a long lip," Captain Chapman answered heatedly. "It ought to be torn off."

Strange to say, these words spoken by the angry police captain were a prophecy. Horatio Harper had a favorite horse that was ordinarily of the gentlest temper. But one morning when its master went out to take his morning drive around the Speedway the horse seemed to be possessed of an evil spirit.

"Good morning, old chap," said Harper, "glad to see you. Are you going to give us your best speed this morning?"

He raised his gloved hand to stroke the shining chestnut nose. The horse that usually accepted these attentions with pleasure now wrinkled its nose wickedly and angrily thrust aside the hand that stroked it.

"What, what!" cried the owner of the horse. They were the last words that he spoke for many weeks. The beast thrust forward his nose and fastened his teeth in Mr. Harper's upper lip, grinding it almost to a pulp in his rage.

Mr. Harper fell fainting at the animal's feet. Only the intervention of a groom saved his life. For a time it was feared that he would die of blood poisoning. He recovered at last, but the mark of the vicious horse remained upon it. He was scarred for life.

Misfortune is said to have fallen upon the professional entertainers at the dinner. Cora Rount, Minnie Renwood, the Lee Sisters, Kathleen Warren, then prominent dancers, are reported to have had nothing but ill-luck after they took part in this unfortunate entertainment.

Arnold Lawson has figured in some dramatic episodes during his career. One of them happened twenty years ago, when